

Earthworks -- 2007 Press Releases

Billboard Highlights Mercury Health Threat

Jan 29, Reno, Nevada -- "Exposure to mercury causes learning disabilities and memory loss. Not to mention memory loss," warns a [new Reno billboard](#) unveiled today by a coalition of conservation and native community groups concerned that mercury pollution from gold and silver mines is a public health risk. The groups, Great Basin Mine Watch, Western Shoshone Defense Project, and Earthworks, last month urged the State of Nevada to determine the need for fish consumption advisories for northeastern Nevada waterways due to mercury from Nevada's mines.

"Nevada's families have a right to know the truth about mercury," said Dan Randolph, executive director of Great Basin Mine Watch, a Reno-based conservation group. "The billboard informs people about the health risks, and asks the mining industry, which is the single largest mercury polluter in the state, to do its part to eliminate this threat."

Last summer, University of Nevada researchers found elevated levels of mercury in fish sampled in the Wild Horse Reservoir 60 miles north of Elko that exceeded the level deemed a health risk by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This is consistent with data obtained from the Nevada Department of Wildlife in a previous study of mercury concentrations in fish in northern Nevada. Children and pregnant women are most vulnerable. Mercury in the form of methyl mercury is a powerful neurotoxin that can impair brain functioning, kidney damage, and other health problems. The downwind states of Idaho and Utah have already issued health advisories because of mercury contamination of fish in reservoirs and lakes.

"It worries me that the health of Nevada's kids and families could be compromised by eating fish from reservoirs and streams downwind of Nevada's gold mines," said Larson Bill, of the Western Shoshone Defense Project. "The mines are on our land without our permission, and the fish have been telling us that something is wrong in their environment," he added.

Lawmakers returning to Carson City for the legislative session set to begin on February 5th may see the "Mercury Causes Memory Loss" billboard on Mill Street just east of Kietzke Lane. Great Basin Mine Watch and other groups are urging state lawmakers to beef up the state's mercury regulations enacted last spring, which fall well short of what is needed to protect public health. Not only do the regulations fail to cap mercury emissions, they do not require any verifiable mercury pollution reductions at all. In addition, the regulations allow the mining industry to monitor and police itself with no explicit provision for government site inspections. Several gold mines have dramatically increased their emissions in recent years.

According to EPA's Toxics Release inventory, northern Nevada gold mines release over 4,600 pounds of mercury into the air each year about 18 times the amount of mercury released by the average coal-fired power plant. Northern Nevada's gold mines are the largest single industrial source of U.S. mercury air emissions west of Texas.

Earthworks, a Washington, D.C.-based conservation group paid for the ad, which will run through February.

For more information and to view a copy of the ad, click on:

www.getthemercuryout.org

Source: http://www.earthworksaction.org/PR_HgMemoryLoss.cfm